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& improve the health  
of all people  
in Florida through  
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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**Enjoy Lee County waters with standard precautions**

Fort Myers, FL—The Florida Department of Health in Lee County urges people spending time around the water to enjoy it as usual while following standard precautions to stay safe from preventable injuries and illnesses including drowning, bacterial infections and amebic infections.

Despite the recent media frenzy, bacterial infections caused by *Vibrio vulnificus* are rare, estimated to affect only 1 percent of the population. Contrary to some of those news reports, when this bacterium enters through an open wound in the skin, it does *not* cause necrotizing fasciitis (flesh eating). As with any bacteria that enter through the skin, infection prevention includes proper wound cleansing, and keeping the wound clean and dry until it heals. Prevention of gastro-intestinal illness caused by *Vibrio vulnificus* is not eating raw shell fish, such as oysters.

*Vibrio vulnificus* can be successfully treated with antibiotics when caught early. When infection does occur, it spreads into the blood stream and causes septicemia. Individuals with pre-existing medical conditions, especially liver disease, are estimated to be 80 times more likely to develop bloodstream infections.

Recreational water's greatest risk is drowning. Standard water safety precautions for drowning and infection include taking the following steps:

- Don't swim in saltwater or brackish water with an open wound to avoid bacterial infections
- Don't eat raw shellfish, including oysters
- Wear a nose clip while swimming and enjoying water sports in warm fresh water to avoid amebic entry
- Avoid digging in or stirring up the sediment while taking part in water related activities in shallow, warm freshwater
- Never swim alone
- Adults should actively watch children while in or near water
- Wear a life jacket when boating and when swimming with limited skills
- Learn to swim
- Learn water rescue skills and CPR

Drowning is the leading cause of death for children under 5 years old, and second leading cause of death for children 14 and under. Residential swimming pools are the site of most pre-school age drownings caused by lack of adequate supervision.

Amebic infections caused by *Naegleria fowleri* from exposure to natural fresh water are extremely rare, estimated to affect only 30 people between 2004 and 2013. This amoeba causes death in nearly all patients.

Swim lessons are available through city and county parks and recreation departments and the YMCA in Lee County. CPR certifications can be earned through the American Red Cross or American Heart Association.

For more information go to [www.floridahealth.gov](http://www.floridahealth.gov).

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